

IN NUBIBUS.

THE COGITATIONS OF A SMOKING PHILOSOPHER.

BY THE REV. G. J. LOW.

PIPE I.

MY READING of late has been of a very mixed character. I have gone through the Report of the Parliament of Religions held in Chicago, and I have read over again the "Symposium on the Soul and the Future Life" which appeared in the *Nineteenth Century Review* some years ago. This symposium, to which men of all kinds of belief contributed, was led off and closed by Mr. Frederick Harrison, the high-priest of Positivism in England. The result of all this study is that I am utterly perplexed, confused, bewildered in my ideas as to religion.

As a corrective, I tried a paper read by some worthy cleric at a ministerial conference, on "How to Deal with Modern Thought," but I did not get much enlightenment. "Modern Thought"—and what *is* Modern Thought? Is the daily paper its expression? Take, for instance, this Sunday issue of the *Daily Annunciator*, with its forty pages, more or less, of reading matter. What food for the mind does it afford? What is the *menu* of this Feast of Reason? The *pièces de resistance* are, as a matter of course, political articles in abundance; some grave, some frivolous, some bland, some bitter. For the rest of the banquet we have: the records of some noble deeds,—a long list of atrocious crimes,—the sermon of the revivalist,—the lecture of the freethinker,—the séance of the spiritualist medium,—the last discovery of science,—the last gigantic swindle,—the last miracle at the shrine of some saint,—the last dynamite outrage. What a witches' cauldron is the daily paper! What a chaos is Modern Thought!

Now in the midst of all this Babel, what conclusion can be reached by a man whose religious opinions are in a state of flux? Like Kant, after discussing his "antinomies," I feel like saying: "Everything sinks under us. The most perfect Being, as well as the most insignificant, floats in mid-air without support . . . to disappear without resistance."

But here is a report of the last session of "The American Congress of Liberal Religious Societies" (see *The Open Court*, p. 5139), perhaps I can find in it the $\pi\omicron\upsilon\tilde{\nu}$ $\sigma\tau\tilde{\omega}$ amid all these floating, sinking, vanishing things. At this session Mr. E. P. Powell, of Clinton, N. Y., read a paper on "The Foundations of Religion,"—that's just what I am seeking. He says these foundations are "Headship, Dependence, and the Hope of the Future."—"God in higher terms is Father, Worship in higher terms is Love, and Creed in higher terms is Immortality."

Now, all this sounds very well: we might call it Religion reduced to its lowest terms. But the problem remains as perplexing as ever; these metaphysical abstractions hardly satisfy one. "Headship"—of what or of whom? "Dependence"—on what or on whom? "The Future"—for what or for whom? "God is the Father." But I want to know, Is there a God who is the Father? Is there a necessity for worship, whether you call it love or not?

I shall just put aside all this literature. I shall for the nonce shut up my books and stow away all my pamphlets and papers, and light my pipe and think. I must begin *de novo*, and it seems to me the whole matter resolves itself into the questions: "Is there a God?" and, "Ought we to worship Him?" Now, all these authors I have been reading, who have given various answers to these two questions, may be ranged under four heads. These are:

1. Theists, who say, There is a God, somehow, somewhere; and we ought to worship him.

2. Atheists, who say, There is no God and cannot be; and all worship is frivolous and vain.

3. Agnostics, who say, We don't know if there be a God or not, and we never can know; and to worship the unknown and unknowable is foolishness.

4. Positivists, who say, We do not know if there be a God; but we must act on what we do know: and we know that worship is an instinct and necessity of our nature; therefore let us worship something, though we don't exactly know what.¹

¹ The Positivism alluded to is, be it remembered, that of August Comte, of whom Mr. Frederick Harrison is an ardent disciple; the French Positivism with its fantastic Worship and Rit-

Now, under which head do I come? Not under the first or second, because I can neither assert nor deny that there is a God. I must then be an agnostic. And yet, no. For an agnostic's creed practically amounts to this: "I don't know if there be a God, and I don't care; the unknowable is no concern of ours." Now, I *do* care. I cannot conceive of any problem of more moment to me than: "Is there a God or not?" The agnostic in physical science is not admired. Professor Proctor (*Familiar Essays on Scientific Subjects*, article "Oxygen in the Sun") speaking of the dark lines in the spectroscope, says: "A physicist of some eminence spoke of these phenomena in 1858 in a tone which *ought very seldom to be adopted* by the man of science. "The phenomena defy, as we have seen," he said, "all attempts to reduce them within empirical laws, and no complete explanation or theory of them is possible." Well, in 1859 these "inexplicable" phenomena were explained by Kirchhoff. Now, this eminent physicist of 1858 was an agnostic *in re* the dark lines, and as such incurs Professor Proctor's reproof. Why should the agnostic in any branch of philosophy be applauded? Surely, the question, "Is there a God or not?" is of at least equal importance to us as the question, "Is there oxygen in the sun or not?" No, I cannot be an agnostic; for though I don't know, still I *do* care. I would prefer to be classed among those of whom the Christian Scriptures speak, as "seeking after God if haply they might feel after Him and find Him."

Well then, there is nothing left but the last head, Positivism. Mr. F. Harrison and other followers of Aug. Comte argue that worship is a necessity of our nature. As Mr. Powell puts it, "dependence" prompts worship. Well, then, I will be a Positivist, and worship: but what or whom? To be sure, the masters of the school abound in suggestions:—"Worship humanity in the abstract." "Worship the Power that makes for righteousness." "Worship Sweetness and Light." "Worship the True, the Beautiful, the Good." All very nice and very pretty; but too vague for me. I can't worship mere abstractions; I can't feel overawed by mere adjectives, even when dignified with the definite article and capital letters.

I have it! I will make "worship" an intransitive verb, and "worship" just as I "think" or "breathe." The next question is,

ual. This is a very different thing from the Positivism propounded by *The Monist* and *The Open Court*. In these, Positivism means that philosophy which bases everything on positive facts and traces all things to the bottom rock of experience. Such philosophy, I am free to admit, seems to me the only possible meeting-ground for religion and modern science.

how? What mode of worship shall I adopt? What shall be my ritual?—I have it again! I see by the *Daily Annunciator* that the clergy of the diocese have lately been holding “Retreats” and “Meditations”: I will take my cue from them. My worship shall consist of certain hours of retirement in my library, during which I will cogitate on these problems while I smoke my pipe. Yes, my big meerschaum shall be my Altar of Incense. I will forbid all intrusion while I offer my burnt-offering. To quote the Christian Scriptures—for I see Mr. Harrison and the rest can do that very glibly—I will commune with my own heart, in my chamber; and while the incense ascends, I will jot down my thoughts on these subjects at each “Devotion.”

[TO BE CONTINUED.]